(European Conference of Christian Education – ECCE / 25.-29. März 2019 Berlin)
PANEL: Be curious Exploring the extraordinary in the everyday)

PPT 1 Foto Kein Abfalleimer

PLEASE DO NOT FEED!
How to educate children by learning from children[1]

When I was searching for ECCE in the internet, it offered me first of all not „European Conference of Christian Education“, but „Energy Conversion Congress and Exposition“ and „European Centre for Creative Economy“. That figures! A Conference of Christian Education, learning from children, is elementary about „energy conversion“ and „creative economy“. „To chill out“ comes from „chil-dren“, isn't it? Let's see.

PPT 2

1 Childlike versus childish

At first we have to notice an important differentiation. We have to distinguish „childlike“ from „childish“. „Childlike“ is was Jesus praised. „Childishness“ is a perversion of adulthood. „Childishness“ is a perversion of adulthood, which pervert the Gospel into moralism. There is no way from childishness to mature faith. The biggest enemy of christian education is the childishness of the religious staff. (Autsch!)

Behaving in an infantile manner has a lot to do with egoism, taking offence easily, blaming others for one's own mistakes and telling on others. Maturity is a matter of composure, responsibility, decision-making and knowing one's limitations. How do we recognize a religion which conducts itself in a morally mature way? Because that's the goal of christian education, to enable humans to bear responsibility for their existence. This extends not only to interesting discoveries and useful general knowledge (intelligence – always in danger of procociousness), but reaches as far as matters of the heart (courage / streetwise). A sign of quality for serious christian education is the renouncement of moralistic simplifications and clerical monopolization, as well as abstention from euphorically palming off easy answers on the learners.

Don't take me wrong: Morals are important. Nothing is without morals or moral standards. Whether it's in the family, with neighbors, in the classroom or place of work, camping, in street traffic, city, state or the world community: without moral standards, nothing works. It's a good thing that we have soldiers, police and referees. Thanks God for the state's law enforcement agencies. Morality, values, rules and order are indispensable. But morality, in christian education, is understood as a necessary evil. Law, order, rules and values are all necessary! Without justice and order, everything would fall asunder and go astray. But christian education declares that order, finally, is not the key to a successful life. One recognizes this when one has tried to uphold order. Following the rules is important and good, but it will not bring us a sense of fulfillment in our lives. In christian education we have to fulfill the law (Matthew 5,17) by leaving it to the cops and convers our energy from a moralistic pattern into a pastoral care / counseling register. At first, this sounds unconversant.

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[1] Dedicated to my first grandchild Helena Suvi born in January.
This is a decoupling of my App theofy; for more information see www.theofy.de. ; see also www.howdoesthegospelhappen .

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But it points to a *trans*moral perspective. Christian education embodies this perspective under the rubric of "gospel."

PPT 3

2 Learning from children

The philosopher Peter Sloterdijk pointet out, that „we old adult Adams and Evas" „derive from great-grandparents, who never have been allowed to be children"[2] ("dass wir von Ureltern abstammen, die niemals Kinder sein durften"). That's the reason why "learning from children" is not an euphemistic phrase, but a basic necessity for human beeing.

Jesus praised the children, the minors, the amateurs, the dilettantes and absolute beginners.[3] What can we learn from them? The psychoanalyst and author Wolfgang Schmidtbauer understands, what the jesuanic and apostolic traditions saw in the young people. Quoting Schmidtbauer with children there comes a teammate on the life stage oft he adults,

„who can relieve and facilitate the situation. Because the child has the most securest distance to fixations. The love for children makes it possible for adults, to become into a process of maturation. The child as a master of mourning is superior to therapeutic experts. But this period of apprenticeship will only succeed, if the partners abstain from naiv symbiotic requirements. Children are not perfect. They give adults a chance to find out how hollowly and constricting theire ideas of a real and good life are. Children are practice, training, incentive. Only if adults and children can mutually benefit from each other to develop each other in mutually confrontation, the modern society facing increasing emotional stress has a chance."[4]

Children are existentialists. The existenz of children has a clue of the morning light of the kingdom of God: the playfull ease of beeing, the playfull improvisation of the gospel. The Gospel places everything transmorally and thus impertinently on the wager that I, just as I am, may enjoy favor. Children show us clear how I can bear to be myself. Look at the children of the playground: Stay hungry. Be curious. Let go. Let it be. Relax.

PPT 4

2.1 A few everyday-standards for the extraordinary, prophetic gift of childlikeness

- Letting them off
You know the problem of letting the kids off in Kindergarten or at elementary school in the very beginning? Let's see if we can learn from little Marcus:

PPT 5 Video „Forever!" (4:10)
PPT 6 Video

Kids feel, if we want them to leave or not. They know exactly. So we have to become honest clear what we want and don't carry out our conflict on the back of the children.
It's a special challenge for parents to bless their children. Constant presence, providing

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[2] Peter Sloterdijk, Neue Zeilen und Tage, Berlin 2018, 512.

[3] Matthäus 5,3; 18,1-6; Markus 10,13-16.

[4] Wolfgang Schmidtbauer, Partnerschaft und Babykrise, Gütersloh 2012, 147-151, 187.

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security at all times, overprotecting in the hopes of making them happy are the opposite of blessing. Blessing means letting them off, but not letting them out of God's sight.

- *„Grandpa, when will you die?“*
You know situations like this? Uuups, attention, children ask questions!

PPT 7 Video Parenthood (5:45/muss simultan übersetzt werden
or a short abstract before)
PPT 8 Video

PPT 9 Video Picket Fences (3:00)
PPT 10 Video
PPT 11 Video
PPT 12 Video

Children learn, even before they start in school, which questions are permissible and which are taboo. Before their teachers utter a word, they have already come to know the unforgettable lesson of how we respond to them: “It’s just that way.” “You should ask!” “Shut up!” “It’s nothing!” “Do you want to have an ice cream cone?” “Go out and play with your toys!” Children sense in our tone of voice and the looks we give them our tactics of diversion and avoidance, which convey what they are not allowed to ask. They come to make this discovery with an often painful clarity. In response to their alert and spontaneous questions, we immunize them with shame and embarrassment. They come to sense that “I’m not allowed to ask this.” Later on, nothing is left for them other than a narrow obedience to science, superstition, or ignorance.

(By the way: Concerning the subjekt of death Martin Luther recommended that „we should not consider and contemplate death at an inopportune time“. He said: „In life one should practice thoughts about death and call for these when death is still far away and isn't cornering us. But when we are dying, when death is already powerfully present itself, then it is dangerous and useless. One must disclaim image and not want to see it.“ According to this view we do exactly the opposite. We comfort or distract the young person who is wide awake and trustingly asks about the Why, Where From and Where To, only to circle around dark thoughts when we're under shock or very little time is left (in hospice care, for example). It is better to welcome children early into the circle of mortals and to initiate them in the appropriate rituals. The question about the end of life belongs at the beginning!
So: „Grandpa, when will you die?“ „Wow – ähm, (count 1,2,3 seconds): good question! ...“)

- *Don’t manipulate*
With my students I practice an exercice called „The sick grandma“. Which set offers the better education?

1) You know how gladly grandma would see you, but you should only visit her, if you realy want to!
2) You have to visit grandma at her birthday, regardless of wether you are fatally bored.

Manipulation starts with habitualized tone and sound. The danish family therapist Jesper Juul recommends to renounce to be honey-tongued and full of sweet talk.[5] Instead of this we have to be a good, respect-giving sparring partner.

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[5] Jesper Juul, Eltern-Coaching. Gelassen erziehen, Weinheim 2011.

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- *Don't feed*

PPT 13 Video The Wire (2:16)[6]
PPT 14 Video

Children are born curious. They hunger for brain- and soulfood. They are intrinsic thirsty for knowledge. So we want to feed them. In Germany the cornet of cardboard filled with candy symbolizes this drastically.
„We eat bread, but we live on radiance," says the author and poet Hilde Domin. This is about „Creative Economy". Christian education has to encourage consumption skills because the question „What would you like?" is a loaded question, and it demands an answer. Shopping means exploring a field of values. Greater than the desire to get something we want is the desire to *find out* what we really want."[7]
Clever advertising only promises things which we ourselves find promising. Let's take a „transmoral" look at the human phenomenom of obsessive, insatiable demand. What do we dream of? Why do we stay awake at night, what drives us to distraction, what keeps us from slumber? What are the constraints of our lives, our addictions? What consumes us? And will the things which are promising keep those promises? „For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16,26) Nowadays they try to still insatiable hunger by the generous use of moralistic seasonings – well, actually by serving morals as the main dish. But morals are not filling.
Christian education feeds the hunger and leads the children to an existential field of deficit / shortage.[8]

PPT 15

3 Conclusion

We have to consider that life is not a bowl of cherries and christianity not that harmless religion. And we have to differentiate between morals and Gospel (which distinction - quoting Martin Luther – is the highest art of christianity, Than children give us a wink: It is never too late for a happy childhood.

PPT 16 Foto Drawing God

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[6] The scene lasts hardly more than two minutes: a four - or five -year-old child is standing in the middle of the night, wide awake, in an apartment. Its babysitter Kima (who is the godmother) has fallen asleep in the easy chair. She wakes up and asks: „What's wrong, baby? Can't you sleep?" The child shakes its head. Kima gathers it in her arms and schuffles with it to the refridgerator, opens the door, the light falls on both of them and goes off when Kima closes the door again. She pauses, then goes to an open window (it's a warm summer night). She seats herself with the child on her lap on the windowsill. Outside the moon is shining. She says: „Let's see. Do we want to wish everyone good night?" And then good night is said to all: the moon, the stars, the policemen in the squad car which races by with its siren going, the addicts, the dealers, the crooks and and swindlers, and finally: „Good night to all the people, a good night to all."

[7] Norbert Bolz, Das konsumistische Manifest, München 2002, 111.

[8] Psalm 23 – The good shepherd – is not about the land of milk and honey; it's a prayer with background of darkness, bad luck, comfortlessness and hidden enemies.

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